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ABSTRACT

A report is given of the findings of a follow-up study of a field-based program for preparing preservice teachers for inner-city schools. This program moves preservice teacher education from the realm of isolated theoretical instruction toward a realistic clinical approach through the use of a professional semester format. During this semester students teach in inner-city secondary schools under the direction of their university supervisor and the cooperating teacher. The follow-up study on the program consisted of questionnaires to the graduates of the program and also to teachers who had not participated. The results indicated more success in handling classroom problems and greater satisfaction with preservice training on the part of those who had been involved in the program than was indicated by those who had not. (JD)

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"LEARNING TO TEACH IN THE INNER-CITY
A FOLLOW-UP STUDY"

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LEARNING TO TEACH IN THE INNER-CITY

A FOLLOW-UP STUDY

The purpose of this article is to report the findings of a follow-up study of a field-based program for preparing pre-service teachers for inner-city schools. From 1972 to 1976, 280 university students successfully comleted their teacher certification requirements in a low socioeconomic area of Dallas. These students were typically from a middle class, white background.

Description and Development of the West Dallas Teacher Education Project

A charge consistently leveled at colleges of education is that their pre-service courses are too theoretical and unrealistic. The professor of education is normally put in the position of attempting to present solutions in class to problems which the pre-service teacher has not yet faced (and may not face for another year or two). This "traditional approach" to teacher education is far from ideal and a number of alternatives are being developed.

With all its shortcomings, the pre-service teacher education program found in the typical university does a fair job of preparing teachers for service in middle class schools. However, in terms of preparing teachers who can be successful in inner-city schools, teacher educators have failed miserably. All too often, the first year teacher who is assigned to a "tough" urban school discovers that he simply cannot cope with what he finds there.

If he "sticks it out," it is only with extreme effort on his part. Often he must settle for "keeping school" instead of "teaching."

The West Dallas Teacher Education Project (WDTEP) represents an attempt to move pre-service teacher education from the realm of isolated didactic instruction toward more realistic clinical approaches through the use of a professional semester format. The program focuses on preparing teachers to be successful in inner-city schools. This program, sponsored jointly by North Texas State University and the Dallas Independent Schools, began with the fall semester of 1972.

The entire West Dallas Teacher Education Project is housed "on site" in the shadow of downtown Dallas in Adamson, Pinkston and Pinkston Annex High Schools. The two high schools and one 9th grade school enroll more than 4,000 students.

Prior to joining the program, participants have taken only the introductory education course. During their semester in the program, students earn the remaining fifteen semester hours of professional education course credit required for teacher certification. At the beginning of the semester, each program participant is assigned to a public school "cooperating teacher" for student teaching. The student teaches during the morning hours and works with his university professors in instructional seminars in the afternoons in classrooms furnished for the program at Pinkston High School. These seminars continue for the first eight weeks and replace the traditional required education courses taught on campus. Seminars are competency-based and focus on the solution of problems identified by the student teachers as

they work with secondary school students in the classroom. Competencies are developed through the use of a wide variety of activities including demonstrations, micro-teaching, role-playing, lectures, laboratory sessions, writing exercises, and field trips. A "walk the block" program is used to acquaint the student teachers with the community and its residents. Additionally, all student teachers work in a West Dallas community center after school hours as volunteers in order to have informal contact with their students outside of school.

After the first two months of the semester, the student's competencies are evaluated and he is assigned tentative grades for the course work portion of his fifteen semester hours. If he is not satisfied with his grades, the student may re-study the areas in which he performed poorly and take alternative forms of the tests to attempt to raise his grades. At this midpoint in the semester, university professors and cooperating teachers are able to work directly with student teachers in the classroom on a more intense, daily basis.

The West Dallas Teacher Education Project has the following program objectives:

(1) To provide competency-based teacher education designed to prepare teachers for successful teaching in the inner-city.

(2) To reduce the gap between didactic instruction and clinical instruction by integrating the two in a field-based, professional semester approach.

(3) To provide pre-service teachers with depth level experiences working with students in schools as well as in community settings.

(4) To improve the teacher preparation program by means of full involvement of public school personnel as teacher education team members.

During the first six years of operation, the program has prepared approximately thirty-five pre-service teachers each semester. Most of these students were seniors, though some already had degrees and were working on teacher certification. All were volunteers. The program staff considers this crucial because of its firm belief that the problems in inner-city schools will be solved only when those schools are staffed by teachers who want to teach there.

Likewise, the university professors who make up the staff are also volunteers who are not satisfied with traditional on-campus approaches to teacher education and who feel an urgency to provide special preparation for inner-city teachers. The professors assume responsibility for liaison with the principals and cooperating teachers in the three schools as well as supervision of student teachers in the schools. The staff members team teach the instructional seminars.

Resources for the operation of the West Dallas Project come directly from the regular operating budget of the College of Education. The Dean of the College has provided financial as well as professional support in the implementation of program goals and objectives.

The Dallas Independent School District contributes classroom facilities for seminars, audio-visual equipment, and offices and phones for the program staff. The principals and teachers in the target schools have been very helpful and cooperative, and occasionally assist with the instructional seminars.

The WDTEP contributes to the improvement of teacher education in the following ways:

(1) It clearly defines the goals and objectives of the teacher education program, and then identifies the competencies that program participants must possess in order to accomplish these goals. (This is considered and essential element in an age of educational accountability.)

(2) It provides for a well-trained, qualified teacher who is especially equipped for successful teaching in educationally disadvantaged inner-city schools.

(3) It provides a more clinically-oriented, less-sterile, pre-service teacher education training experience than is available in traditional university campus-based teacher preparation programs.

The Follow-Up Study

This study was conducted in 1977. Questionnaires were sent to those people who earned their teaching credentials in the West Dallas Teacher Education Project between 1972 and 1976. A second questionnaire was sent to current educational employers of Project graduates.

Purposes of the Follow-Up Study

(1) To determine if and where former students in the West Dallas Teacher Education Project (WDTEP) were employed as teachers.

(2) To determine how many student teachers were employed in inner-city schools.

(3) To determine how successful these teachers had been as beginning teachers in inner-city schools.

(4) To determine former students' perceptions concerning the appropriateness of their training.

(5) To obtain suggestions for program improvement based on the results of responses made by graduates.

Analysis of the Data

Of the 280 students who successfully completed the WDTEP between 1972 and 1976, researchers were able to locate current addresses for 260 Project graduates. Of these, 250 returned their completed questionnaires which amounts to a 96 per cent return. Of the 250 respondents, 123 (49.2%) were male and 127 (50.8%) were female. There were 213 white respondents (85.2%), 26 black respondents (10.4%), and 11 Mexican-American respondents (4.4%). One hundred and eighty-three (73.2%) graduates sought teaching positions immediately after graduation, while 67 (26.8%) did not. Reasons for not seeking a teaching position included 11 respondents who chose to attend graduate school, 8 decided against teaching as a career, 3 already had other good jobs, and two went to law school. A total of 41 other reasons were given including decisions to enter social work, professional theater, and VISTA. Of the respondents who went into teaching, 83.1 per cent taught in inner-city schools while the remaining 16.9 per cent chose to teach in suburban or rural settings. When Project graduates who were not currently teaching were asked if they anticipated entering the profession within the next five years, 52.6 per cent said yes, 25.8 per cent said no, and 21.6 per cent were undecided. A total of 91.2 per cent of West Dallas Project graduates seriously seeking a teaching position have been able to obtain one.

When respondents were asked why they chose this Project, most explained that they sought out the program because of its practical combination of theory and practice, the extended length of the student teaching period, and the opportunity to work with culturally different students. When asked how well their experiences in WDTEP prepared them to teach, 59.6 per cent of the teachers said the Project was highly effective, 37.2 per cent said it was moderately effective, 2 per cent said it was moderately ineffective, and 1.2 per cent said it was highly ineffective. Willis Nicklas did a study similar to the present one which included 1974-75 graduates of North Texas State University who obtained teacher certification. He found that 12.2 per cent of his respondents were extremely satisfied with the way their education courses had prepared them to teach, 48.4 per cent were moderately satisfied, 30.9 per cent were moderately dissatisfied, and 8.6 per cent were extremely dissatisfied (1, p. 109). Thus, West Dallas Project graduates showed considerably greater satisfaction with their teacher education program than did graduates who participated in Nicklas' study.

As to the extent that their academic subject matter preparation adequately prepared them to teach, 32.4 per cent of the teachers reported they were extremely satisfied, 48.8 per cent said they were moderately satisfied, 11.6 per cent said they were moderately dissatisfied, and 7.2 per cent said they were extremely dissatisfied.

A total of 48 respondents indicated that they left the teaching profession after one or more years. Of that number, 29.2 per cent reported that their primary reason was that they could not live on a teacher's salary, 27.1 per cent left to continue their education, 12.5 per cent left because they did not enjoy teaching, and 31.2 per cent left for "other" reasons.

From a list of sixteen commonly reported problem areas of teachers during their first years of teaching, graduates were asked to check five areas they felt best prepared for by their experiences in WDTEP. The results appear in Table I. Project graduates listed understanding of culturally different students and classroom management abilities at the top. Others listed included adjusting to the role of the teacher, providing for individual differences, and planning and preparing effective lessons and units. These results are in stark contrast to those reported by Nicklas (1, 128-129). He reported that classroom management was the area which participants in his study felt <u>least</u> prepared to handle. Other problem areas in descending order were providing for individual differences, and planning and preparing effective lessons and units.

Table I

AREAS OF BEST PREPARATION BY WEST DALLAS PROJECT EXPERIENCES

Area	Number	Per Cent
Understanding of Culturally Different Students	136	81.9
Classroom Management and Control	129	77.7
Adjusting to the Role of a Teacher	107	64.5
Providing for Individual Differences	77	46.4
Planning and Preparing Effective Lessons and Units	62	37.3
Stimulating Interest Among Students	50	30.1
Questioning Skills	41	24.7
Values Clarification	40	24.1
Presenting Well-Planned Lessons	35	21.1

West Dallas Project graduates were asked to check five problem areas for which they felt least prepared. The results appear in Table II. Respondents rated keeping of records and reports as the greatest problem. Other problems included supervising extra curricular activities, use of instructional media, evaluating student progress, and planning with students.

Table II

AREAS OF LEAST PREPARATION BY WEST DALLAS PROJECT EXPERIENCES

Area	Number	Per cent
Keeping of Records and Reports	93	56
Supervising Extra Curricular Activities	71	42.8
Use of Instructional Media Resources	58	34.9
Evaluating Student Progress	53	31.9
Planning with Students	50	30.1
Stimulating Interest Among Students	39	23.5
Becoming Accepted by More Experienced Teachers	34	20.5
Planning and Preparing Effective Lessons and Units	33	19.9
Values Clarification	24	14.5

A second major component of the follow-up study was to have principals rate Project graduates and compare them with other beginning teachers with whom they had worked. The results of these data are shown in Table III. These data indicate that current educational employers of West Dallas Project graduates are highly pleased with graduates' professional competencies and performance on the job.

Table III

PRINCIPAL'S RATINGS OF PROJECT GRADUATES

Characteristics	Superior		Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Classroom Management	24	14.5	60	36.1	54	32.5	19	11.4	9	5.4
Understanding of Culturally Different Student	27	16.3	72	43.4	50	30.1	13	7.8	4	2.4
Sensitivity to the Needs of Individual Students	36	21.7	68	41	39	23.5	17	10.2	6	3.6
Pupil-Teacher Relationships	37	23.4	61	36.7	44	26.5	15	9	9	5.4
Professional Attitude and Conduct	42	25.3	57	34.3	41	24.7	16	9.6	10	6
Preparation and Planning	37	22.3	57	34.3	55	33.1	12	7.2	5	3
Knowledge of Subject Matter	32	21.7	74	44.6	52	31.3	4	2.4	0	0
Public Relations	32	19.3	53	31.9	51	30.7	22	13.3	8	4.8
Techniques of Instruction	30	18.1	57	34.3	58	34.9	17	10.2	5	3
Overall Ratings	34	20.5	63	38	46	27.7	19	11.4	4	2.4

Conclusion

After six years of operation, the West Dallas Teacher Education Project has prepared more than 400 teachers for successful teaching in the inner-city. The Project is a permanent, ongoing alternative at North Texas State University to the traditional teacher educational program on campus.

The major problems facing education today seem to revolve around teaching the culturally different. Beginning teachers are increasingly being assigned to teach in the inner-city. Student teachers who "make it" in field based, inner-city teacher education programs are much better prepared to teach in any setting than are their traditionally trained counterparts. Dallas School Officials indicate that West Dallas Teacher Education Project graduates now teaching in Dallas have significantly lowered teacher turnover.

FOOTNOTE

[1]Nicklas, Willis, "A Follow-Up Study of the 1974-75 Graduates of North Texas State University Who Obtained Certification to Teach, " unpublished doctoral dissertation, North Texas State University, 1976.